



Superfund sites settlement OK'd

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TRENTON - State and federal environmental regulators have reached a \$21.5 million settlement with a Montgomery Township manufacturer alleged to have contaminated groundwater at two sites in Somerset County, the state Attorney General's office announced yesterday.

The funds will be used to remove the industrial solvent trichloroethylene from a municipal well in Rocky Hill and from groundwater at a Montgomery Township housing development. Both sites were placed on the national Superfund list more than a decade ago.

The company, Princeton Gamma-Tech, manufactures scientific instruments.

High levels of the solvent, a volatile organic compound found to cause cancer in laboratory rats, were discovered in Rocky Hill in 1978 and later in well water in a Montgomery residential neighborhood.

Ten years later, the federal Environmental Protection Agency notified Princeton Gamma-Tech of possible liability. The EPA sued the company in 1991 under the Superfund law.

Princeton Gamma-Tech does not admit guilt in the consent decree, said Peter Aseltine, a spokesman for Attorney General Peter Harvey. Jeffrey Cohen, an attorney for the company, could not be reached for comment yesterday.

The money will be used to build a plant to extract and treat the contaminated water, a process that is expected to take several decades, Aseltine said. The EPA will begin construction of the water treatment plant this spring.

The state Department of Environmental Protection also will remove soil contaminated with the solvent from the Princeton Gamma-tech property.

In Rocky Hill, borough water is being treated by an air stripper before it reaches local faucets. In Montgomery, all but a couple of households have switched from well water to a public water system, municipal officials said.

"I think it's very good news that we reached a settlement," said Montgomery Mayor Louise Wilson. "It's very important to get the contaminated water out of the ground. The plume was migrating toward the Millstone River."

Wilson said the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers last year gave municipal officials a presentation on

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the cleanup plan.

"It's been a long and arduous process," she said, adding of the company, "I am hoping this is good news for them, too."

Money from the settlement will also pay for past treatment costs at the sites. Just over \$1 million will be set aside as compensation for environmental harm and will be used to fund additional restoration projects in the area, state officials said.

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